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An Account of Copulation of the Western Diamond Rattlesnake

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There is seemingly some controversy concerning the "dance" of the diamond rattlesnake, *Crotalus atrox* Baird and Girard. Some observers have assumed it to be associated with courtship and mating (Davis, 1936; Gloyd, 1947), while others contend that the dance is not related to courtship, but is a "territorial fight" or "combat dance" between two males (Lowe, 1948). The information presented here is not intended to decide this question, but rather to add to the information available in the hope that it may aid more qualified persons in making a decision.

On August 23, 1948, about 7:00 A. M. while working on a white-tailed deer research project, I observed two diamond rattlesnakes on the Seth Martin Ranch, 12 miles south of Mason, Mason County, Texas. They were first noticed on a rocky ledge about five feet from the observer when one of the snakes began to rattle. It was noted that the snakes were already united in copulation. I slipped away as quietly as possible and went to the automobile to get a pistol. Upon returning about ten minutes later, I was extremely cautious to prevent disturbing the pair. When next observed the snakes were still united in copulation, and twined about each other with their heads extending approximately 18 inches above the ground. A swaying motion of the heads was noted, but it seemed that the action was necessary in order to maintain balance while in the upright position. An almost constant peristaltic action was noted in the abdominal regions of both snakes, especially immediately above the areas of union. During this time one of the pair was rubbing his head up and down the neck of the other, giving an impression of tender affection between the two.

In approximately ten minutes the pair moved about four or five feet into a clump of turkey pear (*Opuntia leptocaulis* D. C.). When one of the

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pair was shot, the other began to drag the dead one. The unharmed snake dragged the dead one about 12 feet before it, too, was shot. Upon examination it was found that the female had been shot first. The snakes remained united fully five minutes after death until relaxation of the hemipenes.

These specimens were preserved and later donated to the Texas Cooperative Wildlife Collection at College Station, Texas.

Literature Cited

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